

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NATIONAL WETLANDS INVENTORY MAPS ISSUED

The National Wetlands Inventory Program of the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service moved a step forward with the publication of the first maps depicting wetland areas in the Nation.

Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Robert L. Herbst accepted a framed map from the first run and heartily endorsed the program plus the seminar sponsored by the Environmental Law Institute.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Biological Services is conducting an inventory of all the wetlands of the United States, including its territories and possessions. The National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) will create a data base, in both map and computer form, in which wetlands data will be collected, interpreted, stored, and reproduced.

The last national wetlands inventory surveyed only the lower 48 States and field work was completed in 1954. Since the 1954 inventory, a large amount of wetlands modification has occurred. In addition, the importance of wetlands in the biological and physical environment is more widely appreciated, and a better methodology exists for classifying and inventorying this resource.

At the Federal level alone, there are at least 10 groups within the Department of the Interior, as well as nine other Federal agencies including the Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Federal Highway Administration, which have

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indicated a need for the data to be produced by the NWI. A wide range of regional, State, and local governmental bodies, and private conservation groups can apply these data to their own programs.

With the Fish and Wildlife Service, there are two major needs for wetlands inventory data:

--The Service is currently required to process approximately 35,000 permit applications per year for activities using wetlands. A recent court decision, broadening the scope of Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act amendments of 1972 to include all waters of the United States, will add to this workload. The NWI products will identify wetlands, help establish boundaries of controlled areas, and allow an area, region, or flyway analysis. This will reduce costly field examination and time-consuming permit-by-permit procedures.

--Each year, a considerable amount of money is authorized for the migratory bird wetland acquisition program. The NWI products will allow critical areas to be identified to help set priorities in the national acquisition program.

There will be over 2,000 maps in the series which will display topical wetland information on U.S. Geological Survey base maps and will depict all 50 States, territories, and possessions. Wetland boundaries and types will be shown using a new hierarchical classification system with stronger definitions making the scientific data easily transferable between States and among regions of the country.

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